

MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS

A. Why do problematic behaviors evolve?

- Inherent temperamental characteristics: emotional, frequent moodiness, excess activity or impulsivity, rigid about how things are done or struggles with change etc
- Excessive and/or inconsistent expectations of the child
- Familial stress, conflict, marital discord, financial strain, mental illness, trauma, etc
- Developmental challenges creating a lack of skills making it challenging to cooperate: i.e, separation anxiety, learning challenge or disability, social pressures, etc,
- Unintended reinforcement of behaviors that leads to attention seeking
- Avoidance of tasks a child doesn't like
- Seeking access to activities, people or things a child wants
- Parents are emotionally unavailable due to depression, anxiety, stress or possible substance use
- Atypical development creating anxiety and rigidity

B. Steps towards managing challenging behaviors:

1. Create regular “special time” with your child: At least 15 minutes uninterrupted time alone with the child where you follow your child's leads and engage in an activity of his/her choosing. Do not take over the activity, watch, ask no questions, give no commands, and give positive statements of approval such as “I like it when you...”

2. Use distractions: as much as possible change an activity, bring different toys out of storage, go outside, increase your affect to distract the child from undesirable behaviors.

3. Ignore behaviors that are minor and unimportant.

3. Catch your child being “good”: Give short simple requests and compliment your child for complying. Stop what you are doing to catch this behavior. Give simple commands face-to-face while removing distracters. Praise him for independent play.

4. Demonstrate empathy: Let your child know that you appreciate how difficult things can be. Always listen to what he has to say without correcting or commenting and present the problem while allowing him some choices in the problem solving. “I know it can be difficult for you to get your homework done well every night, what might be some things we can do to make sure this becomes easier for you?” Brainstorm together.

5. Invite your child to be part of the solution: Use collaborative problem solving strategies so that your child articulates the goals he sets for himself. List them or display them with pictures.

5. Choose your battles. Never make a request or threaten a punishment unless you are willing to follow through; i.e., do not threaten a punishment that you can not or do not want to carry through. Eliminate conflicts that are unimportant.

6. Consider using a Home Token system for rewarding good behavior. Younger children need immediate rewards while older children can earn points for delayed gratification.

7. Use Time- Out for non-compliant behaviors that involve aggression or hurting others or important things and be clear and consistent about when these are used and how. Avoid other responses that encourage; such as raising your voice, threatening, or rationalizing in response to non-compliance or unacceptable behaviors.

8. Teach Self-Calming: Teach your child to identify and use language to express when he is upset and create a safe and comforting place for him to go to calm. Reward for this.

8. Communicate and coordinate with teachers and other adults in your child's life to ensure consistency in expectations. Consider using a daily report card with teachers.

9. Give clear and consistent requests by getting eye contact, making sure your child hears you and use clear and simple words.

10. Use visuals and social stories for problematic times so that the expectations are clear and consistent: if you know your child is likely to have problems or be resistant, use visual schedules and social stories to provide him with scripts for behavior and rehearsing the expectations and anticipated sequence of events. Make certain you reinforce all attempts at compliance.

REMEMBER THAT ALL CHILDREN WANT TO BE GOOD. OUR JOB IS TO SUPPORT THEM SO THEY CAN BE.

C. Helpful references:

- 1. The Explosive child by Ross Greene**
- 2. Effective Parenting for the Hard to Manage Child by Kendall and De Gangi**
- 3. No More Meltdowns by Jed Baker**